

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 16APHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
20 November 1985

Defector possible cover for CIA 'mole,' U.S. believes

By Michael Wines
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — U.S. experts studying the case of Soviet KGB officer Vitaly Yurchenko are coming to think that he was a double agent dispatched to debunk a top defector's warnings of a Soviet "mole" within the CIA, according to senior intelligence officials.

The officials described the suspicions — which arise from a new CIA analysis of the information Yurchenko provided before he returned to Moscow — as "not a clear-cut case" and said that CIA opinion on his reliability remained deeply split.

But they said close study of independent intelligence data, combined with disclosures Yurchenko made during his three-month debriefing at a CIA "safe house" in Virginia, suggest a "clear pattern" designed to steer U.S. experts away from a double agent.

Separate information leads those counterintelligence experts to conclude that if a mole exists, he probably occupies a "very senior level" within the CIA, said the officials, who spoke Monday on the condition they not be identified.

The officials said they were making the new fears public because they hoped to prod the administration, Congress and the CIA itself into a thorough review of the nation's

intelligence apparatus. President Reagan last week secretly ordered an investigation the CIA's handling of all defectors, they said.

Word of a possible Soviet spy within the CIA came from another top Soviet agent, 20-year KGB veteran Oleg A. Gordiyevski, the intelligence officials said.

Gordiyevski, the Soviet secret police's top officer in Britain, had been working as a double agent for a decade when he quietly defected to the West in April, the officials said.

He is reported to have told British intelligence only that a mole was somewhere "in the U.S. government," saying his information came from "corridor talk."

Britain kept the intelligence coup under wraps until five months later, when it expelled 25 Soviet nationals accused of spying. U.S. officials have said that Yurchenko sought asylum at the U.S. Embassy in Rome in August, four months after Gordiyevski secretly defected.

Yurchenko "told us there were no moles in the CIA," one official said, but "you can build a fairly solid case that Yurchenko was conceived, created and set in operation because of Gordiyevski."

"When you put it up to a suspicious optic, a lot of pieces fall into place," he said. "... But it's a hell of a long way from proof."

Yurchenko's highly publicized flight Nov. 2 from a Georgetown cafe to the Soviet Embassy's residential compound created a pre-summit propaganda coup for the Soviet Union and stirred long-simmering unrest over the way the CIA handles East-bloc defectors.

Intelligence officials said that the broader White House investigation would be conducted separately from the agency's own internal investigation of the Yurchenko debacle. It is aimed at uncovering U.S. mistakes in the way defectors are debriefed and introduced into Western society, in an effort to cut the substantial rate at which they return to their homelands.

Until now, most intelligence experts have assumed that Yurchenko was a sincere defector, wracked by depression and a broken love affair, who was grossly mishandled by his CIA custodians.

No other explanation, they have said, would easily explain why a man touted by the CIA as the second-ranking Soviet spy in North America would place himself in the hands of the CIA's most expert interviewers.

But the theory that Yurchenko was sent to protect a KGB agent within the U.S. government offers one plausible explanation for taking such a risk, officials said.